342 hut. The door is equipped with projecting pivots on top and bottom, the ends turning in two troughs carved into the door-frame.

The overhanging roof protects most of the wall from being damaged by driving rain, and the darkness inside is also a protection against the sun-loving flies. The average hut needs re-thatching every 5 to 8 years, and an additional coating of clay plaster mixed with straw every 2 to 3 years. Old huts, abandoned due to fire, war, death [777] by sickness, etc., are considered unlucky and are not rebuilt. Sometimes their remaining walls are used as windbreaks for garden crops.

Interior architecture consists of the following:
(1) a high-fencelike partition of bamboo ("mäqa") to give privacy to the master and his wife, usually center-right from the door, with a special high elevation on which the bed of the couple is set; another high partition, usually to the left of the door or toward the rear, for nighttime shelter for calves, goats or the family mule. This fencelike, permanent partition is called "get" or "gedgedda";
352 (2) a solid clay bench which runs along half the interior of the walls, on one or both sides of the door, about 16 inches high, called "mädäb" usually covered with sheepskins. On this clay bench men sit during the day with visitor, while sipping barley beer, and at night the children sleep on them, covering themselves with the sheepskins;
(3) on top of a center-rear elevation of rock and clay, up to 42" high, rests the "alga", the master's bed, 15"-30" high. It consists of a wooden frame on four wooden

671 The intent of these guiding principles and defini-
696 tions were to aid thejudge to arrive at a just verdict, preferably a "Solomonic" one. Guides were considered desirable, perhaps due to the absence of the principle of any law of precedence. The emphasis was on the "Code", and this was reinforced by the culture pattern of "literalness", in behavior.

In effect, however, these guides have enabled both draconic or bribed (and therefore lenient) judges to interpret the law with considerable subjectivity. Clever talkers-in-court never fail to use their ability to sway the public audience, which usually has a tremendous effect on the judge.

671 The effect of the "Fetha Nägäst" was to link the
777 church and state. There were usually 12 provincial chief justices, "wombär", in allusion, apparently, to the 12 apostles. The "Fetha Nagäst" ruled all marriage, even
586 684 the non-ecclesiastical "semanya" marriage outside the church premises. Divorce proceedings in the old-Amhara areas still can be carried through only with agreement of the "mänfäs agway", the soul-confessor, one of the priests of the parish, although no divorce is possible in a church marriage.

This "mänfäs agway" receives a small salary from the state; he can summon local state police if the accused mate has refused to appear, to bring him by force. If the divorce is granted, the "mänfäs agway" usually sentences both mates to a fine of Eth$5.- payable to him, on the grounds that both are technically lawbreakers for

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

MODERNIZATION AND THE PEASANT

*565 121 At the beginning of this chapter we alluded to stereotyped views of the peasantry held by modern-educated Ethiopians who have no meaningful communication with them. It may be fruitful at this point to consider the relationship between the peasant's world and Ethiopia's quest for modernity in the form of a series of critical responses to these stereotypes.

Three views of the peasantry are of particular relevance. One sees the peasant as exploited, hence potentially progressive; one sees the peasant as uneducated, hence reactionary; and a third sees the peasant as traditionalist, hence irrelevant to Ethiopia's modernizing culture. In responding to these opinions we shall discuss, first, the peasant's conservatism; second, areas of the peasant's receptivity to change; and, finally, aspects of peasant culture which may have a positive value for Ethiopia in transition.

Peasant Conservatism

Those who eulogize the simple integrity of peasant life and regret the peasant's suppressed condition in a social order pejoratively termed "feudal" at times maintain that with a radical change of leadership in the government the peasantry would respond with renewed economic initiative and progressive orientation. Given leaders they can trust, it is argued, the Amhara peasants would support radical efforts to restructure their lives and would participate meaningfully in democratic political procedures designed to promote social change.

*565 121 178 181 This view overlooks the fact, which has impressed travelers of many centuries in Ethiopia, that the Abyssinian peasant clings to his traditional ways with unruffled tenacity. The flavor of his conservatism may be illustrated by the following conversation with an unusually open-minded peasant in Manz. The man was complaining about the dangers presented by a little stream between his home and the local church during the rainy season. "If you can't put up some kind of bridge," I suggested, "why do you not stretch a heavy rope across it so people can hold on to something and not be swept away?" "That is a good idea," he replied, "but we just do not do that sort of thing around here."

Such behavior has been explained by many observers, Ethiopians and foreigners alike, as due to simple laziness. No peasant can afford to be simply lazy, however. The roots of this inertia go deeper. They touch a number of fundamental features in Amhara peasant culture which orient the peasantry against the introduction of novelty.

*565 121 777 178 One of these is the concept of fate (*eddīl*) which the Amhara invoke to account for the ups and downs of their lives. *Eddīl* appears to signify the working of God's will insofar as it affects human purposes, and is to be re-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

garded as more important than human effort in attaining one's goals. "If a man works hard, he may remain poor. If he does not work hard, he may become wealthy. The outcome is due to fate." The peasant is discouraged from determined efforts to make changes in his environment because of the feeling that no matter what he does, God's disposition is what really counts.

In addition to feeling that innovation is ineffectual, the Amhara peasant tends to feel that it is immoral. Reverence for fathers and forefathers is, we observed, a key element of the Amhara ethos. This patriarchal sentiment informs the Amhara's defense not only of his land and his religion, but of the procedures of daily living as well. It is not good to deviate from the familiar ways of doing things because they, too, have been handed down by "our fathers"; this is a phrase which interlards Amharic conversation.

A number of other, more specific, norms have had the effect of discouraging inventiveness among the Amhara. Experimentation with matter was inhibited by the disdain for puttering about with one's hands—doing anything, that is, similar to the activities of the socially dejected artisans and slaves. Hence the peasant retains the same rudimentary tools for wresting a subsistence from nature that he has used for millennia, and searches about the woods for a properly shaped piece of wood rather than improve his art of carpentry.[16] Experimentation with ideas was inhibited by the anti-intellectual cast of Amhara culture, which discredits the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. Ideas pertain either to the unchangeable mysteries, as expressed in the religious literature, or to the unchanging verities of human experience, as expressed in folk proverbs. Ideas are not entertained as "adventure," to use Whitehead's term—as a source of novel possibilities in life, a guide rather than a justification of custom.

Two factors are especially significant in accounting for the Amhara peasant's reluctance to use ideas drawn from experience and insight for the purpose of reshaping custom. One is the fact that the primary medium for the elaboration and dissemination of such ideas—the written word—was affected by a number of restrictions in Amhara culture.[17]* As a consequence, although writing has been known in Abyssinia for two millennia, it had almost never

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* The act of writing was considered to be inherently shameful: like any manual activity other than farming and fighting, writing was regarded as degrading work, the business of scribes whose status was thereby not much higher than that of potters and metalsmiths. Only a small percentage of the clergy learned to write, and those who did were rarely adept at it. The products of writing, moreover, were deemed either too sacred or too nefarious to warrant giving laymen easy access to their medium. Script belonged above all else to the realm of scripture. The awe felt for holy writs was a deterrent against using that medium for other than devotional purposes. The chief private use of writing was for the magic formulas of the *dabtarā*, another connection with the supernatural that discouraged its lay practice. The *dabtarā*'s art served injurious as well as beneficent purposes, and the fear that those who learned to write might stumble onto potent phrases was reason for restricting that skill to a small group of the initiated.